



INTEREST GROUPS Lecture Notes



I. **Interest Group** – an organization of people sharing a common interest or goal that seeks to influence government policy

- A. **1st Amendment** = Constitutional basis for interest groups: assembly, petition, speech, press, some cases religion
- B. Interest groups are key **linkage institutions** that connect citizens to government and vice versa.
- C. **Lobbyist** – a person, often a professional, attempting to influence government decisions on behalf of a special interest group

II. Types of Interest Groups or “Interest Groups according to Sabato”

- A. **Economic IGs** gr w/ primary purpose of promoting the financial interests of its members = profits & benefits
 - 1. “Big Three” = bus. + lab. unions = farmers
 - 2. Ex: Chamber of Commerce, AMA
 - 3. most have perm. lobbyist offices in DC
- B. **Public IGs** - organization that sees a collective good that will not selectively and materially benefit the members of the group
 - 1. Ex: Progressive Era groups @ turn of the century
 - 2. Common Cause, ACLU, Greenpeace, AARP
- C. Liberal Interest groups/PACs:
 - ACLU
 - National Abortion Rights League
 - Amnesty International
 - NAACP
 - American Bar Assoc.
 - Greenpeace
 - AFL-CIO (labor unions)
 - MoveOn.org
- D. Conservative Interest groups/PACs:
 - Federalist Society
 - National Right to Life Committee
 - Christian Coalition
 - NRA
 - American Medical Assoc.
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - American Crossroads

III. How Interest Groups Influence Government

- A. **Lobbying Congress** - testify at hearings, contact government officials directly, talk to press; alerting cong to effects of a bill on their districts, etc.
- B. **Lobbying Executive Branch** – White House and federal agencies
- C. **Lobbying Regulatory Agencies** - Ex: FDA, EPA, FTC
- D. **Program Monitoring** – National Organization for Women (NOW) AND review of Title IX compliance
- E. **Lobbying Courts** - especially Supreme Ct >>> sponsorship of *amicus curae* briefs (ACLU); signal support or opposition to Supreme Court nominees (Robert Bork, Clarence Thomas)

- F. *Grass roots Lobbying* - involve people at the bottom level of political system >>> door-to-door info & petition drives, internet
- G. Organize *Protest Rallies* - some members willing to put everything on the line for a cause >>> Shays' Rebellion, MLK & nonviolence, KKK, Freedom Works Tea Party group
- H. *Candidate Endorsements*
- I. *Creating Political Parties* - Ross Perot's United We Stand to Reform Party in 1992; Nader to Green Party
- J. *Contribute Money* - campaign contributions through PACs
- K. *Sponsor "Issue Ads"*

IV. K Street, Washington DC – center of American lobbying

V. Regulating Interest Groups???

- A. *Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995*
 1. Lobbyist > devotes 20% of time client's time to lobbying activities
 2. Report amounts paid by each client
- B. *Honest Leadership & Open Government Act of 2007*
 1. Bans gifts to members of Congress and staff
 2. Toughens disclosure requirements